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BILLS

OF THE SOCIETY

OF THE

PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS.

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[Many persons in Fredericton and its vicinity having recently joined the Methodist Society, some of whom may be unacquainted with its peculiar Rules and Usages, it has in consequence been thought proper to print as many copies as will enable the Superintendent to furnish one to each Member ; and it is hoped that they will meet with an attentive and prayerful consideration.]

RULES OF THE SOCIETY

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OF THE

PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS.

1. In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, (as did two or three more the next day,) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together ; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, *viz.* on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them, (for their number increased daily,) I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them ; and we always concluded our meetings with prayer suitable to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the UNITED SOCIETY, first in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than “*a company of men having the form, and seeking the power, of Godliness ; united, in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.*”

3. That it may the more easily be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective

places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every Class : one of whom is styled, *The Leader*. It is his business,

I. To see each person in his Class, once a week at least, in order

To inquire how their souls prosper ;

To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require ;

To receive what they are willing to give, towards the support of the Gospel :

II. To meet the Ministers and the Stewards of the Society once a week, in order

To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reprov'd ;

To pay to the Stewards what they have received of their several Classes in the week preceding ; and

To show their account of what each person has contributed.*

4. There is one only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these Societies, viz. "*a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins.*" But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind ; especially that which is most generally practised : Such as

The taking the name of God in vain :

The profaning the Day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling :

Drunkenness : *buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them*, unless in cases of extreme necessity :

Fighting, quarrelling, brawling ; brother going to law with

* The following are Mr. Wesley's own words relative to this subject. See Minutes of Conference at London, 1782.

Q. 31. Have the weekly and quarterly contributions been duly made in our Societies ?

A. In many it has been shamefully neglected. To remedy this,

1. Let every Assistant (Superintendent) remind every Society that it was our original rule : Every member contributes one penny weekly, (unless he is in extreme poverty,) and one shilling quarterly. Explain the reasonableness of this.

2. Let every Leader receive the weekly contribution from each person in his Class.

3. Let the Assistant ask every person, at changing his ticket, "Can you afford to observe our rule?" and receive what he is able to give.

brother ; returning *evil for evil*, or *railing for railing* ; the using many words in buying or selling :

The *buying* or *selling uncustomed goods* :

The *giving* or *taking things on usury* ; i. e. unlawful interest :

Uncharitable or *unprofitable* conversation ; particularly speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers :

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us :

Doing what we know is not for the glory of GOD ; as

The *putting on of gold and costly apparel* ;

The *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the LORD JESUS ;

The *singing* those *songs*, or *reading* those *books*, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of GOD :

Softness, and needless self-indulgence :

Laying up treasure upon earth :

Borrowing without a probability of paying ; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these Societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity ; doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men :

To their bodies, of the ability that God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by helping or visiting them that are sick, or in prison :

To their souls : by instructing, *reproving*, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with ; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that “ We are not to do good, unless *our hearts be free to it* : ”

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be ; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business ; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them *only* :

By all possible *diligence* and *frugality* that the Gospel be not blamed :

By running with patience the race that is set before them, *denying themselves*, and *taking up their cross daily* ; submitting to bear the reproach of CHRIST ; to be as the filth and offscouring of the

world ; and looking that men should *say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.*

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these Societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God : such are

The public worship of God :

The Ministry of the Word, either read or expounded :

The Supper of the Lord :

Family and private Prayer :

Searching the Scriptures : and

Fasting or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our Societies : all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways ; we will bear with him for a season ; but then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us : We have delivered our own souls.

JOHN WESLEY.

CHARLES WESLEY.

May 1, 1743.

RULES RELATING TO THE SOCIETY.

I. Of Receiving Members into Society.

1. The Leaders' Meeting has a right to declare any person on trial, improper to be received into the Society ; and after such declaration, the Superintendent shall not admit such person into Society.

2. Neither the Superintendents, nor any other Preachers, shall give Tickets to any, till they are recommended by a Leader, with whom they have met, at least, two months on trial.

3. No Preacher shall give notes (admitting persons on Trial) to any but those who are recommended by one he knows, or till they have met three or four times in Class.

4. He must give them the Rules of the Society the first time they meet.

5. As some of our people have in different parts of the kingdom, been imposed on, in various ways, by Swindlers, who professed themselves Members of our Society, let no person be received into any Society, without a certificate, signed by one of the Itinerant Preachers in the Circuit from whence he professes to have come. 1797.

II. Of the Exclusion of Members from the Society.

1. The far greater number of those that are separated from us, exclude themselves by neglecting to meet in Class; and use the other means of grace, and so gradually forsake us. With regard to others,

2. Our rule is fixed, and our custom expressed in the preceding Rules of the Society, where it is said, "If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, —we will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season; but then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us."

3. No person must be expelled from the Society for any breach of our Rules, or even for manifest immorality, till such fact or crime has been proved at a Leaders' Meeting.

III. Of permitting Strangers to be present at the Society-Meetings and Love-Feasts.

1. Let every other Meeting of the Society be for the Members of the Society only; and let no strangers be admitted. At other times some may be permitted to be present: but the same persons not above three times.

2. Let all the Members of the Society show their Tickets; and if the Stewards and Leaders are not exact, others must be employed that have more resolution.

3. Let no person attend any Love-Feast, without a Note from the Preacher.

4. Let no Love-Feast be appointed but by the consent of the Superintendent; nor any Funeral Sermon be preached, without his consent, and for those only who die happy in the Lord.

IV. Of Service in Church-Hours.

The cases in which it has been agreed to allow service in what are commonly called Church-Hours, are,

1. When the Church-Minister, Rector, Vicar, or Curate, is a notoriously wicked man.

2. When he preaches Arian, Socinian, or any other equally pernicious doctrine.

3. When there are not Churches in the Town or Parish sufficient to contain the people.

4. Where there is no Church within two or three miles.

5. When a majority of the Trustees of any Chapel, on the one hand, and of the Stewards and Leaders of the Society belonging to that Chapel, on the other, allow of and request it ; and as to places where there is a Society and no Chapel, wherever the majority of the Stewards and Leaders of that Society testify that it is the wish of the people, and that it will cause no division among them.

6. Wherever Divine Service is performed in England on the Lord's Day, in Church-hours, the officiating Preacher shall read either the Service of the Church, our venerable Father's Abridgment of it ; or at least, the Lessons appointed by the Calendar. But we recommend either the full Service or the Abridgment.

V. Concerning the administration of the Ordinance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in our Societies.

1. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall not be administered in any Chapel, except a majority of the Trustees of that Chapel, on the one hand, and the majority of the Stewards and Leaders belonging to that Chapel, as that best qualified to give the sense of the people on the other, allow it. Nevertheless, in all cases, the consent of conference shall be first obtained before this Ordinance shall be administered.

2. Where there is a Society, but no Chapel, if the majority of the Stewards and Leaders of that Society testify in writing, to the Conference, that it is the wish of the people, that the Lord's Supper should be administered among them, and that no separation will be made thereby, their desire shall be granted.

3. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall not be administered

to a Society in a private House, within two miles of a Methodist Chapel.

4. The Lord's Supper shall be administered by the Superintendent only, or such of his helpers as are in Full Connexion, and as he shall appoint ; provided that no Preacher be required to give it against his own inclination; and should it be granted to any place where the Preachers on the Circuit are unwilling to give it, the Superintendent shall, in that case, invite a neighbouring Preacher, who is properly qualified, to give it.

5. It shall be administered at such times and in such manner as the Conference shall appoint. And the Conference agree that the Lord's Supper shall be administered among us on Sunday evenings only ; except the majority of the Stewards and Leaders desire it in Church-hours ; or where it has already been administered in those hours. Nevertheless, it shall never be administered on those Sundays on which it is administered in the Parish Church.

6. The Lord's Supper shall always be administered in England according to the form of the Established Church : but the person who administers shall have liberty to give out hymns, to use exhortation and extemporary prayer.

7. Wherever the Lord's Supper shall be administered, according to the above-mentioned regulations, it shall always be continued, except the Conference order otherwise.

8. No person shall be suffered, on any pretence, to partake of the Lord's Supper among us, unless he be a member of Society, or receive a Note of admission from the Superintendent, (or the Preacher administering,) which Note must be renewed quarterly. And if any Leaders, Stewards, or Trustees, refuse to be regulated by this Rule, the Sacrament shall not be administered where this is the case.

9. The administration of Baptism and the Burial of the dead, shall be determined according to the Regulations above-mentioned respecting the Lord's Supper.

VI. On Conformity to the World, and Sabbath-breaking.

1. Those School-Masters and School-Mistresses who receive Dancing-Masters into their Schools, and those Parents who employ Dancing-Masters for their children, shall be no longer Members of our Society.

2. To prevent or remedy the evils of dram-drinking, evil-speaking, unprofitable conversation, lightness, expensiveness or gaiety of apparel, and contracting debts without due care to discharge them, or smuggling, buying or selling uncustomed goods, the Preachers shall solemnly and frequently warn the Societies against these evils, and inform them, that they who are guilty of them cannot be permitted to remain with us.

3. We strongly recommend to all the Members of our Societies, the religious observance of the Lord's Day, and desire our Superintendents to exclude from the Society all who buy or sell on that sacred day, except in case of medicine for the sick, or for supplying necessities for funerals.

4. No Member of our Society must employ any Barber on the Lord's Day. And all our people, who possibly can, are desired to employ only these Barbers who conscientiously abstain from Sabbath breaking.

5. No Member of our Society must make any Wake or Feast, or go to any, on the Lord's Day, but bear a public testimony against them.

VII. Of Marrying with Unbelievers.

Some of our Members have married with unbelievers, yea, with unawakened persons. This has had fatal effects. They have had either a cross for life, or turned back unto perdition. To put a stop to this, every Preacher is enjoined to enforce frequently the Apostle's caution, "Be not unequally yoked." And he is openly to declare, that whoever does this shall be expelled the Society. When any such are expelled, he is to subjoin a suitable exhortation, and to urge all single persons to take no step in so weighty a matter, without advising with the most serious of their Christian friends.

VIII. Of Bankruptcies.

To prevent scandal, whenever any of our Members become bankrupts, the Superintendent shall talk with them at large: and if any of them have not kept fair accounts, or have been concerned in the base practice of raising money by coining notes, commonly called the Bill Trade, he shall be expelled immediately.

IX. Of Loyalty and Subjection to the King and Government.

None of us shall, either in writing or conversation, speak lightly

or irreverently of the Government under which he lives. We are to observe, that the Oracles of God command us to be subject to the higher powers: and that "honor to the King" is there connected with the "fear of God." 1792.

X. Of Days of Fasting.

A general Fast shall be held in all our Societies the first Friday after Lady Day; after Midsummer-Day; after Michaelmas-Day; and after Christmas-Day.

RULES RELATING TO THE OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETIES.

I. Of the Appointment or Change of Stewards and Leaders.

1 No person shall be appointed a Leader or Society-Steward, or be removed from his office, but in conjunction with a Leaders' Meeting; the nomination to be in the Superintendent, and the approbation or disapprobation in the Leaders' Meeting.

2. As several inconveniencies have arisen respecting the change of Stewards; to remedy this, let it be observed that the office of a Steward ceases at the end of the year; and every Superintendent is required, to change one Steward at least; so that no Steward may be in office above two years together, except in some extraordinary cases.

3. The proper time for changing the Circuit Stewards, is at the Quarterly Meeting, when the Superintendent shall consult all who are present respecting the most proper person or persons to act in that capacity.

4. The place for appointing or changing the Steward of any particular Society, is the Leaders' Meeting of that Society. For, in the general, "No person can be received as a Society-Officer among us, without the consent of that Meeting to which he particularly belongs; nor can any officer be appointed except on the same plan."—Minutes of 1797.

5. The Superintendent of every Circuit shall invite the General Steward of his Circuit to be present at the Annual Meeting of the District Committee, during the settling of every thing relating to the Finances of the District; and every Circuit-Steward shall have a right to be present, and to advise at the settlement of all financial matters. 1801.

II. Of the Local Preachers and their Meetings.

1. The Superintendent shall regularly meet the Local Preachers once a quarter; and no person shall receive a plan as a Local Preacher, nor be suffered to preach among us as such, without the approbation of that Meeting. Or, if in any Circuit a regular Local Preachers' Meeting cannot be held, they shall be proposed and approved at the General Quarterly Meeting of the Circuit. 1794.

2. All Local Preachers shall meet in Class. No exception shall be made in respect to any who have been Travelling Preachers in former years. 1793.

3. Let no Local Preacher, who will not meet in Class, or who is not regularly planned by the Superintendent of the Circuit where he resides, be permitted to preach.

4. Let no Local Preacher be permitted to preach in any other Circuit than his own, without producing a recommendation from the Superintendent of that Circuit in which he lives; nor suffer any invitation to be admitted as a plea, except from men in office who act in conjunction with the Superintendent of that Circuit which he visits.—N. B. The design of this Rule is to prevent any, under the character of Local Preachers, from burdening the people, either by collecting money or living upon them, and to prevent improper persons, who bear no part of the expense, from inviting Local Preachers thus to visit them, but it was never intended to reflect the least disrespect on any of our worthy Brethren, the Local Preachers, whom, as a body, we greatly respect.

5. Let no Local Preacher keep Love-Feasts, without the consent of the Superintendent, nor in any wise interfere with his business. Let every one keep in his own place, and attend to the duties of his station.

6. No Preacher who has been suspended, or expelled, shall, on any account, be employed as a Local Preacher, without the authority of Conference.

III. Concerning Trustees.

1. The Trustees, in conjunction with the Superintendent, who shall have one vote only, shall choose their own Stewards; who shall receive and disburse all Seat-Rents, and such Collections as shall be made for the purpose of paying interest of money due upon

the premises, or for reducing the principal. The aforesaid Steward shall keep proper accounts in books provided for that purpose: which books shall be open for inspection of the Superintendent, and audited in his presence once every year; or oftener, if convenient.

2. No Trustee, however accused, or defective in conformity to the established Rules of the Society, shall be removed from the Society, unless his crime or breach of the Rules of the Society be proved in the presence of the Trustees and Leaders. 1794.

IV. Of the Quarterly Meetings, composed of the Stewards of the different Societies in each Circuit.

1. All Bills for the support of Travelling Preachers and their Families; for house rent, fire, candles, sickness, travelling expenses, and all other matters for which the Circuit cannot provide, shall first meet with the approbation of the Quarterly Meetings, and be signed by the General Steward of the Circuit, before they can be brought to the District Committee.

2. No Circuit shall be divided till such division has been approved by the respective Quarterly Meetings, and signed by the General Steward.

3. Before any Superintendent propose a Preacher to the Conference as proper to be admitted on trial, such Preacher must be approved of at the March Quarterly Meeting. 1797.